



STATE OF IOWA

THOMAS J. VILSACK, GOVERNOR
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BOARD OF PAROLE
ELIZABETH ROBINSON
CHAIR

Memorandum

December 9, 2003

To: Members of the Joint Justice Systems Appropriations
Subcommittee

From: Elizabeth Robinson, Chair

Re: Report on Options to Improve Iowa's Criminal Justice System

This report is being submitted to the Joint Justice Systems Appropriations Subcommittee as required under Senate File 439-Appropriations to the Justice System. Section 11-Iowa Board of Parole "Options to Improve Iowa's Criminal Justice System".

The Iowa Board of Parole offers the following potential options for improving Iowa's criminal justice system:

-Educate county attorneys, defense attorneys and trial judges on the importance of Section 901.9, the Code- Information for Parole Board. This code section provides for the aforementioned three entities to furnish the Board of Parole with a full statement of their recommendations relating to release or parole of a convicted criminal offender. Such written recommendations (for or against or no recommendation), to the Board is very crucial to its decision-making process.

-Section 915.12, the Code-Registration, pertains to the registration of victims of crime by county attorneys. The general public appears misinformed as to how this process is initiated. Therefore, it is imperative that county attorneys be consistent in vigorously pursuing persons who have been victims of crimes in getting them registered. Aggressive victim registration by county attorneys assists the Board, where appropriate, to obtain victim input when it considers release of criminal offenders for their return to the community.

-Generally, supervising appropriate offenders within the community has proven to be more cost effective than incarcerating them in prisons. Given that our prison population has temporarily stabilized, our prison system remains over-crowded. Greater utilization of our Community-Based-Corrections (CBC) system is a vital component to improving the management of our prison population. For those reasons, it would be a benefit to the citizens of Iowa for legislative officials to invest additional resources in this component of our justice system.

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-Criminal justice studies have emphasized the importance of treatment programs for criminal offenders both inside our prisons and for our community-based corrections systems. Treatment programs for offenders (including aftercare) facilitates their rehabilitation, improve their chances to not re-offend and may further reduce recidivism rates. Investing in treatment programs for our prisons and CBC's could have long-term positive benefits that may result in reduced state spending on our criminal justice system.

-The Iowa Board of Parole has continued to protect the public's safety by making thorough and cautious reviews and release decisions of criminal offenders. As the prison population for the most part has steadily increased albeit incrementally, nonetheless the Board's workload has increased well. The Board and its staff continues to handle these workload increases with fewer staff than it had 5 and 10 years ago and along with numerous budget reductions. In order for the Board and its staff to maintain, and continued improve its productivity an appreciable increase in its annual state appropriation will be needed. Legislators should also give consideration to better familiarize themselves on the pivotal role the Iowa Board of Parole has within our criminal justice system. Further education in this area will provide legislators with a clearer understanding of how each justice system component operates and functions therefore, they can more effectively communicate with their constituents about the Board and strengthen community support for our criminal justice system.

-To expedite and improve the Board and its staff daily operation, it must update its computer system. Presently, the Board is working with the Iowa Department of Corrections in converting its current computer system to be compatible with DOC's ICON program. It is anticipated that this conversion will enhance how the Board obtains immediate and current offender information. To better process this information and accelerate its dissemination to appropriate criminal justice system professionals, updating of our current computer system is imperative. An update of our computer systems would allow the Board to inform appropriate parole, work release and revocation decisions via email rather than using the U.S. mail system.

Thank you for considering this information as possible options to improve Iowa's criminal justice system. Should have any questions and/or concerns regarding this report or any other related issues, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Cc: Michael Marshall
Secretary of the Senate

Margaret Thomson
Chief Clerk of the House

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